Stream H --- ATTRACTING STUDENTS TO VOCATIONAL TRAINING

* How to make vocational training ‘cool’: enhancing the reach.
* Creating holistic education versus technical experts.
* Making vocational training relevant and accountable: Ensuring vocational training evolves to meet the needs of the workplace. Role of industry; incentives for performance; transparency; standard setting and monitoring; better governance.
* How do we benefit from international collaborations?
* The need to design a system that leverages education technologies to deliver innovative solutions and create authentic learning environments.

Here are some ideas/thoughts that typically come out of my discussions with students, educators and industry and may be helpful when addressing the discussion topics for this Stream. Much of it is rather straightforward but my experience indicates it is important to set a “common ground” before institutions add/start vocational training programs and I suspect that some of the audience may have similar concerns. Hopefully some of these may spark discussion/dialogue with participants in the session.

1. How to make vocational training ‘cool’: enhancing the reach
   1. Develop a common definition of vocational training and expected outcomes (educators and industry often have varied views of “what it is” and “what it is not” which leads to confusing marketing strategies) and detract from the opportunity that vocational training provides
   2. Understand/identify what is important to students----e.g., jobs, earning money; support a family, independence, ability to maintain responsibilities of family while building career skills, career, location of institution, ability to earn for university education, etc.
   3. Develop career fact sheets for students---use brief career fact sheets to help students understand the opportunities that vocational training provides (e.g., jobs, careers, retraining for new careers, etc.) and include some examples of students/industry success
   4. Promote the benefits of the 3 part win----students, institution and business/industry
   5. Show how industry internships as part of the curriculum----these internships quite frequently lead to fulfillment of careers/jobs after students complete training
   6. Demonstrate the timeline to employment ---- student/industry testimonials are helpful
   7. Compare the costs of education ---- attending vocational training doesn’t preclude a university education
   8. Collaborate with colleges/universities to build a “credit” transfer for students who decide they want to pursue additional education but do not want to lose all they have done to date
2. Creating holistic education versus technical experts
   1. Vocational training should be designed around careers vs. jobs --- many people use job and career interchangeably. A holistic approach creates an understanding of career vs. job--- e.g., almost all students will need some computer and language skills in addition to the technical skills to support a career---- (it may initially seem expedient to teach a medical assistant how to draw blood but if they can’t add the results to the patient’s record on a computer or write down the aftercare instructions so a patient can read them then we have only created job skills not career skills.
   2. Engagement of both education and industry leaders to define a career curriculum and the requirements for individual success
   3. Provide professional certification for vocational training programs (or associate degrees where appropriate)

Note: There is still a great opportunity for vocational training institutions to provide skills training for business/industry. Many vocational training institutions have become the training arm for local businesses since training is the institution’s business. Businesses have often found it too costly to maintain sporadically utilized training facility, develop training programs and maintain a fulltime training staff. Vocational training institutions are using this “business training” model to help underwrite their primary vocational training programs---a major win-win for institutions and business.

1. Making vocational training relevant and accountable: Ensuring vocational training evolves to meet the needs of the workplace. Role of industry; incentives for performance; transparency; standard setting and monitoring; better governance.
   1. Governance----Governance should be part of the vocational training institution’s strategy. Curriculum review committees that include education and industry representatives can often be an important component of governance to help ensure that training is relevant and accountable. Reviews need to be an annual (minimum requirement) which keeps committee members involved and committed to program. The governance model should really address the other topics in the area of relevance/accountability of vocational training.
   2. Role of industry----multiple industry leaders need to be engaged to identify/define their needs, assist in building curriculum/programs and in some cases actually delivering class material or providing working labs (at the institution or on site at a business.) If there are multiple leaders in a specific industry in a geographic area then the institution needs to include all of them in review committees----students suffer if institutions don’t reach out to a cross section of industry in their area.
      1. An incentive for performance----performance is usually related to the individual employees. The incentive for industry is a supply of qualified candidates. In addition, businesses/corporations that offer internships do achieve the benefit of additional staff as well as the opportunity for their current employees to learn mentoring. The test for any program is the number of students that successfully complete a program and actually pursue careers in the area of their training.
      2. Transparency----the curriculum should be transparent to specific businesses/corporations but the industry should not be transparent---there needs to be a very clear relationship between a career program and the industry (ies) that have a need for the career. The fastest way to drive students away is to offer vocational training that can’t be used locally. Note: Transparency can’t be avoided (and shouldn’t be) where specific businesses offer internships/scholarships.
      3. Standard Setting and Monitoring----the standards for a program should be those required by an industry (if available---e.g., many of the IT and medical professions have specific standards that require testing and individuals must meet those requirements prior to certification and in some cases there is a continuing education requirement for these professions.) Institutions need to decide if they will train to a higher standard than the industry or professional requirement ---- decisions on this vary by training program and should be defined in the institution’s strategy. Program monitoring may be at a government level but institutions need to have their review committees “in front” of any external monitoring.
2. How do we benefit from international collaborations?

Sharing, sharing, sharing-----Institutions are seldom in the position of creating a totally new program, therefore sharing of program/curriculum design, learning from success/failures, and sharing of educational leadership all minimize the development costs associated with developing/updating programs. Program development costs are not insignificant and by building international collaborations with other vocational training institutions all can identify, build and share a source of expertise that benefits students.

1. The need to design a system that leverages education technologies to deliver innovative solutions and create authentic learning environments.
   1. Vocational training is the most amendable to the latest learning technology environment.
   2. Technology can provide vocational training to many that can’t afford to travel to attend class----but it is not a replacement for student/instructor interaction. Most of the learning management systems today provide an environment that facilitates online interaction and classroom simulations----the choice of the right one is dependent on the institution.
   3. Many institutions are developing basic courses course curriculums that can be accomplished outside the classroom (even fundamental chemistry experiments can be done in a kitchen)
   4. The use of interactive video can often be used to observe/mentor students/instruct students